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AUTHOR Williams, Harold M.
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ABSTRACT

The arts and humanities convey the very essence of what it means to be a human being. The arts are a basic and central medium of human communication and understanding. As such, they should occupy a central place in education. In the wake of a "back to basics" movement in the schools, the artistic heritage and opportunities to contribute significantly to its evolution are being lost. The arts tend to be ignored in the schools because: (1) they are viewed as emotional rather than intellectual; (2) they are not formally assessed; and (3) the way the arts presently are taught tends to eschew structure or content. In fact, a growing body of evidence indicates that strengths gained in the study of art carry over into other subject areas. Reports suggest that vocabulary and writing skills improved through participation in disciplined based art programs. Early 20th century educators realized that art education improved cognitive skills. More recent art education programs have underscored the broad application of skills learned through instruction in the arts. The raising of the arts and humanities to their rightful place in education would be of service to countless generations of students and to democracy itself. (LBG)

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PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE
ON THE ARTS AND THE HUMANITIES

THE LANGUAGE OF CIVILIZATION: THE VITAL ROLE OF THE ARTS IN EDUCATION

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BY HAROLD M. WILLIAMS

THE LANGUAGE OF CIVILIZATION:
THE VITAL ROLE OF THE ARTS IN EDUCATION

by Harold M. Williams

REMARKS PRESENTED BY HAROLD M. WILLIAMS

Plenary Meeting XXIV of the
President's Committee
on the Arts
and the Humanities

October 3, 1991
The Century Association
New York City

Harold M. Williams

Harold M. Williams assumed his position as President and Chief Executive Officer of the J. Paul Getty Trust in May 1981. Previously he had served as Chairman of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission in Washington, D.C., having been nominated to that position by President Carter in 1977. Prior to that, Mr. Williams held the post of Dean and Professor of Management of the Graduate School of Management at the University of California, Los Angeles. He received his B.A. from UCLA, graduating Phi Beta Kappa, and was awarded his J.D. degree from Harvard University Law School three years later. Mr. Williams' career in business started in 1955 when he joined Hunt Foods & Industries. Following the consolidation of Hunt Foods & Industries, Canada Dry Corporation, and McCall Corporation in 1968, he was appointed Chairman of the Finance Committee and then Chairman of the Board of Norton Simon, Inc. In his service to the community, Mr. Williams holds the positions of Regent of the University of California, Director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Association, Trustee of the Norton Simon Museum of Art, and Member of the California Commission to Review the Master Plan for Higher Education.

THE LANGUAGE OF CIVILIZATION:
THE VITAL ROLE OF THE ARTS IN EDUCATION

I AM PARTICULARLY HONORED to have this opportunity to speak on behalf of the arts and to reaffirm the close kinship of the arts and the humanities. Together, the arts and humanities convey the very essence of what it means to be a human being.

Given the Getty's particular focus on the visual arts, I will concentrate many of my remarks on that art form, although an equally compelling case can be made for music, drama, dance and other art forms, as well as for the humanities.

It is difficult to imagine a human society without the arts. What dark and empty souls would populate such a place — an environment without paintings, statues, architecture, dramas, music, dances, or poems. The arts define what we mean by civilization. They are part of the foundation and framework of our culture. As a universal language through which we can express our common aspirations, the arts are a channel to understanding and appreciating other cultures. To be conversant with the arts is to be a civilized person, to be cultured.

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The arts are a basic and central medium of human communication and understanding. The arts are how we talk to each other. They are the language of civilization — past and present — through which we express our anxieties, our hungers, our hopes and our discoveries. They are our means of listening to our dreams — of expressing our imagination and feeling.

President Bush put it succinctly in his letter that opens the catalogue of the recent American exhibition of the works of Kazimir Malevich.

> "Fine art transcends differences in language and culture, providing a bridge between peoples that fosters better understanding among nations ... It is my sincere hope that all those who view this exhibition will gain a deeper understanding of the dreams — and the timeless truths — that form a common bond among members of the human family."

The arts reaffirm our humanity. They are the glue that holds society together. While improvement in the 3R's may enable us to compete more effectively in the world economically and technologically, it does not feed the human spirit. The most vital stages in the history of any society are marked by a flourishing of the arts. And when most material goods have turned to dust, it is the arts that remain as testimony to the dreams and passions of the past.

The arts can make us whole as individuals. Some years ago, the Nobel prize winning physicist Richard Feynman decided to learn how to draw

at the age of forty-four. He eventually got quite good at it, even though he confessed to having been terrible at art in high school. Later, Feynman, who was a brilliant teacher and thinker in mathematics and physics at Cal Tech, explained why he had taken up art so late in life. He wanted to express the awe he felt about the glories of the universe, he said. Art, he felt, might be the only way he could reveal this emotion to someone who might share it.

Professor Feynman, of course, wasn't the first or last scientist to seek a perspective on his life through the arts. He discovered late what many others are lucky enough to know intuitively — that the arts are key to building the metaphorical bridges that link us to our own creative powers and to each other.

Another perspective on the value of art was expressed by the Poet Laureate of the Library of Congress, Joseph Brodsky, in his Nobel address:

> "If art teaches anything ... it is the privateness of the human condition. Being the most ancient as well as the most literal form of private enterprise, it fosters in a man, knowingly and unwittingly, a sense of uniqueness, of individuality, of separateness — thus turning him from a social animal into a perceptible 'I'."

Today, we live in a society that communicates more and more through visual images. Daily we are bombarded by a constantly changing torrent of messages from billboards, architecture, magazines, four-color newspapers, television and films. New technology controlled by computers combines words, pictures and sound to convey information at a breathtaking pace. More than that, computers, with their power to manufacture and animate images, are creating entirely new art forms.

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Consider, also, that American civilization is increasingly diverse, mixing cultures from Europe, Africa, the Far East and Latin America. Each group sends its own messages and images, jostling to preserve and advance its own identity. And of course, many of the surviving messages from civilizations past exist in visual form.

In short, to be educated is also to be visually literate. That is, to understand the historical and cultural context of the message, to make aesthetic judgments about what one sees, to sort out these images in order to tell the good from the bad, the fake from the genuine, and to interpret accurately the signals of other cultural groups in search of our common humanity. Armed with an ability to make judgments, an educated person will also learn to construct sound value systems for any event or object, whether it is art or not.

It seems fair to ask then, if the arts occupy such a central role in human life, shouldn't they have a central place in education? If we do not teach our children to look and understand what they see, haven't we failed to prepare them for life in contemporary society? Aren't we sending them into the modern world without a complete education?

If a purpose of education is to ensure the continuity of our democratic system and its values from one generation to the next, then why aren't we teaching the things that bring us closest to the core of our cultural experience? If we are spending our resources on a back-to-basics education, why do we tend to ignore something as basic to human development and our culture as the study of the arts?

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Access to the wealth of our culture and the cultivation of the sensibilities, human imagination and judgment are not peripheral educational arms. The arts represent a form of thinking and a way of knowing and, as such, their presence in our schools is as basic as anything can be.

Addressing the impact of the lack of artistic literacy on another art form — music — orchestra conductor, Michael Tilson Thomas lamented:

> "Classical music is the distillation of so many other musical traditions. In the music of Ives, you have references to religious music and to dance music and to patriotic music and to so many other musical traditions. But sadly there are fewer and fewer people, particularly the younger generations, who really are aware of those traditions at all. They've been kind of musically, culturally disenfranchised. Everything settles back in to this one enormous, thumping back beat."

Dr. Ernest Boyer of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching put it well in his study "High School":

> "The arts are essential parts of the human experience, they are not a frill. We recommend that *all* students study the arts to discover how human beings communicate not only with words, but through music, dance, and the visual arts. During our visits we found the arts to be shamefully neglected. Courses in the arts were the last to come and the first to go."

In 1988 the National Endowment for the Arts released the results of a study on arts education that had been two years in the making, titled *Toward Civilization: A Report on Arts Education.* Its assessment of our present state was that "basic arts education does not exist in the United States today."

The Report defines four purposes of arts education: to give our young people a sense of civilization, to foster creativity, to teach effective communication, and to provide tools for the critical assessment of what one reads, sees, and hears.

THE SITUATION is exacerbated by the "back to basics" movement and the budgetary crisis confronting many school districts. With the emphasis on improving the "three R's", many schools have cut back on what they consider to be "frills" including the arts. The result as stated in the NEA's report is that "the artistic heritage that is ours and the opportunities to contribute significantly to its evolution are being lost to our young people."

Not only does the absence or meagerness of the arts in our schools deny children access to the vast treasury of American and world culture, but without it we are not replenishing the infrastructure to assure the cultural future of the country.

Paul Harvey, whose national radio program is listened to by millions, recently gave the following testimonial to arts education:

> "The 'back-to-basics' curricula, while it has merit, ignores the most urgent void in our present system — absence of self discipline. The arts, inspiring — indeed requiring — self discipline, may be more 'basic' to our national survival than the traditional credit courses. We are spending 29 times more on science than on the arts, and the result so far is worldwide intellectual embarrassment."

Skillfully taught and integrated into the general education curriculum, the arts can help to achieve many of the aims of education reform.

If the arts are so basic to becoming an educated person, why are they ignored in our schools?

Professor Eliott W. Eisner of Stanford University examined this question in his book *The Enlightened Eye.* Among the reasons why the arts are ignored were, first, because we have tended to regard them as dealing with emotion rather than the mind, and useful primarily as a release from the serious work of getting educated. This view fails to recognize that creation of images is a matter of mind that calls for inventive problem solving capacities, analytic and synthetic forms of reasoning, and the exercise of judgment. Psychologists and educators recognize that intelligence extends beyond verbal and mathematical reasoning.

A second reason the arts are ignored is that they are not formally assessed and, as a consequence, do not promote the student's academic up-

ward mobility. The arts carry little if any weight in college admission decisions. If arts courses are viewed by college admissions offices as not having much value, it is to be expected that they will be of little importance to upwardly mobile students, their parents, or their schools. This attitude on the part of universities carries through into teacher training, which pays little, if any, attention to preparing general education teachers to present the arts competently in the classroom.

A growing body of evidence from the classroom indicates that strengths gained in the study of art carry over into other subject areas.

A third reason follows from the view held by many art educators that, to the extent that art is taught, it should focus on developing students' creative ability. As such, many have resisted including any structure or content for fear it would stifle creativity. The result is programs lacking substance and perceived as not worthy of inclusion in the curriculum.

There are values to be realized in addition to the direct benefits of arts education which I have described. Skillfully taught and integrated into the general education curriculum, the arts can help to achieve many of the aims of education reform.

A growing body of evidence from the classroom indicates that strengths gained in the study of art carry over into other subject areas. One of the most convincing testimonials to this comes from New Jersey assemblywoman Maureen Ogden:

> "Compare two similar schools; one with strong arts curricula and one without. You'll soon discover that there are non-artistic benefits that make the school with arts curricula a higher performance environment. Most importantly, in such settings the kids are excited about learning. Teachers attribute higher test scores in other traditional subjects to the integration of the arts for learning science, math, reading and the like. And if that isn't enough, go into a multicultural setting and you will witness a common language that enhances cultural understanding and appreciation. You can see a path to heightened self-esteem that permeates those tough social program areas we would prefer to ignore."

There are reports that students' vocabulary and writing skills improve after having been in a discipline-based art program. Teachers involved in these programs have come to recognize their worth, and, as Ogden indicates, teachers in some schools have begun to correlate arts education more closely with other studies such as history or biology.

Assemblywoman Ogden is not alone in her enthusiasm for arts education. This winter, the UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation conducted

an evaluation of the educational impact of the Los Angeles Music Center's Artist in Residence and Teacher (ART) Partnerships. The report found improvement and growth in all areas of the study, including students' cognitive skills, thinking skills, self-expression, attitude development and social skills.

In cognitive skills, the report found that students learn from the factual knowledge and skills presented by the artists and show overall improvement in academic knowledge and skills. Their thinking skills also improved, with students gaining in problem solving ability. Moreover, they were able to use the information and skills learned in other subjects, as well as outside of school. In the area of self-expression, students improved in both written and oral communication. They learned how to express themselves better in writing, speaking in front of others, and acting out their feelings. Finally, attitude development showed improvement as well, with gains in motivation and self-confidence, as well as work habit/cooperation report card grades.

WHAT, exactly, does all this mean for our schools and our children? It means that it is possible to make a difference. That the arts do change lives. That our children will grow through the arts, transforming their own lives and that of their community.

In fact, the arts have a long history in American public education. Arts instruction got its start in the schools in the mid 19th century for purely pragmatic reasons. American businessmen visiting world's fairs abroad observed the drawing systems used in European schools to help students acquire the skills useful in the textile mills and factories. Thus, the Americans noted, the schools were a source of trained labor for industry.

The progressive education movement in the early 1900s turned the schools away from a classical emphasis on cultural content and towards practical preparation for work and homemaking.

Impressed by what they saw, businessmen imported an Englishman named Walter Smith to Massachusetts to set up courses of drawing instruction and to train teachers. Smith developed a system for what he called "free-hand drawing," and his textbooks were published in the United States during the last third of the nineteenth century. Advanced students of this method eventually created some of the design motifs that we associate with late nineteenth-century industry.

Also near the end of the nineteenth century, the manual arts movement appeared about the same time as kindergartens came on the scene. Manual arts involved the development of useful skills through the construction of objects, and any of us who ever pummeled a

piece of clay into a crude ashtray in our early school years are direct beneficiaries of this movement.

The idea that arts education is useful for training future members of the work force is still with us, of course. And we still have very good, if somewhat different reasons for it, as we shall see.

There are other historical strains in American arts education. Just as the McGuffey reader tried to teach morality and taste, early educators encouraged the study of certain works of art to convey moral lessons to children. After 1870, major art museums were established in New York, Boston and other cities, and children were regularly taken there for selective studies of paintings and sculpture. Eventually, art began to be used to illustrate object lessons in social and cultural studies.

Children confronted by a work of art in the context of a comprehensive learning program tend naturally to be fascinated and excited by the challenge and mystery of it.

Early in the 20th century, children's art began to be perceived as encouraging the growth of psychomotor and perceptual skills as well as the development of personality. It was a short step to embracing creative self-expression as a justification for art. Self-expression through art came to be seen as a path to personal growth. This assumption still underlies the practice of studio art in schools today.

Earlier in this century, educator John Dewey insisted that being an artist demanded the same intellectual rigor as being a scientist. Indeed, in his *Art as Experience* this down to earth philosopher said:

> "Just as it is the office of art to be unifying, to break through conventional distinctions to the underlying common elements of the experienced world, while developing individuality as the manner of seeing and expressing these elements, so it is the office of art in the individual person, to compose differences, to do away with isolations and conflicts among the elements of our being, to utilize oppositions among them to build a richer personality."

Dewey's pronouncement helped to set off a line of inquiry into how creativity and comprehension in the arts nurtures the intellect. This research continues today, particularly in the work on the relationship between cognition and art being done by Howard Gardner and Project Zero at Harvard.

THESE ideas and trends, along with others, have helped to shape our ideas and attitudes about art education. But the actual practice of arts education in the classroom is another matter. Here the history of arts education somewhat parallels that of the humanities. The progressive education move-

ment in the early 1900s turned the schools away from a classical emphasis on cultural content and towards practical preparation for work and homemaking.

This so-called "skill" training, as Lynne Cheney, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, has explained so eloquently in her national report on K-12 education, drove out subjects such as English and history. In their place, the professional educators substituted language arts and social studies, which stressed the learning process itself rather than content.

As a result, method tended to prevail over substance in textbooks, in the curriculum, and, to a great extent, in teacher education, as well. The study of major literary works and historical events so important to an understanding of our society literally withered away. As substantive content dried up in grades K through 12, it vanished in the college training of teachers, as well.

The ability to think critically and creatively and to make informed judgments is vital for young people going out into the world of the 21st century.

This emphasis on process over content also resulted in marginalizing the arts in public education. Since then, schools have concentrated primarily on the skills of producing art, an approach that tends to favor the talented few. And as the studies of the humanities disappeared from teacher training, so did any comprehensive study of the arts. In any case, teachers in training have too little time to study the subjects they are supposed to teach, since they are spending so much time studying prescribed formulas for instruction.

Ten years ago, the J.Paul Getty Trust surveyed the state of art education in America's public schools. The picture was bleak. Our findings were consistent with the later findings reported by Professor Eisner and the National Endowment for the Arts study. Few high school graduates had ever been exposed to the arts or art training in their 12 years of schooling. In general, the public regarded art as a fringe activity with little or no importance to a child's education. This notion was widely reinforced by the place of visual arts in the schools, where they were taught more as a recreational and therapeutic exercise than for the development of mental and cognitive skills.

Nevertheless, we found through discussions with art experts and educators that there were in fact other and exciting trends afoot in art education. New ideas and lines of research were developing, some related to the Kettering Project at Stanford University in the late 1960s. The Kettering Project had developed a curriculum for elementary art integrating several

art disciplines. These ideas, fortified by subsequent research, were beginning to jell into a comprehensive strategy we called discipline-based art education, an approach that embraced content from art production, art history, art criticism and aesthetics. There were even a few schools struggling in isolation to nurture a version of such an integrated, sequential art program into maturity.

The arts and the humanities are essential to a complete education and any society that deprives its students of these studies accepts mediocrity.

In 1982, the J.Paul Getty Trust, through the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, committed itself to helping make such an approach to art education a reality. We are engaged in a long-term effort to serve as a catalyst in furthering the theory and practice of art education in America.

Our experience has confirmed the potential of discipline-based art education programs to develop intellectual skills and to create opportunities to explore creative self-expression. We now know, for example, that art instruction that involves students in analyzing works of art, whether their own or others, requires functioning at the highest cognitive levels of mental activity.

Children confronted by a work of art in the context of a comprehensive learning program tend naturally to be fascinated and excited by the challenge and mystery of it. Many classroom teachers, as well, who have had to learn art content through in-service training in order to participate in a discipline-based program, have reported a renewed enthusiasm for their profession.

Students asked to consider art from the standpoints of the artist, the art historian, the critic, and the aesthetician, soon become more perceptive about visual images and more open to different ways of thinking about the same image. The quality of art produced by students themselves improves measurably as they learn about other artists and assess other works of art.

Art history opens the child's imagination to other eras and cultures. If students of the next century are to work and live productively side by side with others from different cultures, they must respect and appreciate cultural differences and, at the same time, discern what they share in common with other peoples. The arts are one of the best ways for achieving this practical goal.

Learning how to critique and judge art sharpens critical faculties by obliging the student to think independently, creatively, and to make rea-

soned judgments based on his or her own knowledge and trained observations. And consideration of aesthetic issues teaches students to be able to deal with the nature and meaning of art in their own lives. The ability to think critically and creatively and to make informed judgments is vital for young people going out into the world of the 21st century.

We are now back again to the main reason that led 19th century businessmen to import European drawing courses to America. This time, however, we are not preparing our children to become better mill workers. The world is changing rapidly and the work place along with it. New work arrangements will require more individual and independent judgments. The likelihood of multiple careers during one's lifetime will demand flexibility and imagination. In an increasingly multicultural society, young people will need language skills and a tolerance of other peoples and customs based on informed understanding.

The present movement toward educational reform offers us a ripe opportunity to further the cause of the arts and humanities in the public schools.

Computer-based technology will require that workers be able to deal with ever more complex and fast-paced systems of symbols and images — the world of Nintendo and MTV grown up. To cope and compete in these surroundings, young people must become visually literate, versed in the language of the arts. Even today, exciting new interactive multimedia programs are beginning to enhance the ways children learn, and before long they may even permanently alter the basic nature of the traditional classroom itself.

There are other, surpassing reasons for restoring the arts and humanities to the American classroom. I know the committee has heard these statements before, perhaps more eloquently than I can voice them. But I want to reassert them, because they are also the convictions that help to energize the Getty Trust's efforts in the arts. We believe that the arts and the humanities are essential to a complete education and that any society that deprives its students of these studies accepts mediocrity. And a democracy that depends on an informed citizenry to sustain it is almost certainly endangered.

The present movement toward educational reform offers us a ripe opportunity to further the cause of the arts and humanities in the public schools. It is daunting to think that wide-ranging change in American schools can only come about through the decisions of 16,000 individual, autonomous local school boards. But Americans have indicated that they are hungry for reform, and they are receptive to innovative programs that work.

And school boards have the advantage of being the closest of all American political institutions to the grass roots.

The success of some of the established discipline-based art education programs has drawn strong public support. For example, in the Robbinsdale, Minnesota, school district, a suburb of Minneapolis, a recent survey of public attitudes about school programs revealed that the arts program had outpolled the athletic program in popularity.

The Aiken, South Carolina, grammar school, as another example, has integrated the arts into the general curriculum. This includes creative writing, visual arts, dance, music, drama and media arts. The school consistently posts high marks in the Stanford Achievement Test and the California Test of Basic skills, and continues to win state and national awards. Last year Aiken was named a National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence by the U.S. Department of Education. Most significantly, the school's performance has helped to convince the state legislature to allocate more money for arts education.

Exciting new interactive multimedia programs are beginning to enhance the ways children learn.

Since 1982, a number of states have adopted policies requiring a year of study in the fine arts as a condition for high school graduation. At the university level, the University of California and California State University System, now give academic credit to high school students who have completed art courses that have features similar to those of discipline-based art education.

We are optimistic about the future. Especially encouraging is the number of people who have joined forces in furthering arts education. John Frohnmayer, as chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, has taken an enormously important leadership role in advancing the improvement of arts education in the schools.

The two endowments, one for the arts and the other for the humanities, have created an arbitrary distinction between two forces that, I believe, must now work closely together if we are to be effective. The President's program for the improvement of the nation's schools has given this committee a wonderful opportunity to advance the cause of the arts and humanities in American education.

The President's statement of national goals for education mentions the improvement of English, math, science, history and geography education as objectives, but it does not include the arts. Nor do the pronouncements of the National Educational Goals Panel or America 2000. I can only hope this

oversight can be corrected, because if the arts are not important enough to be included in our national goals, state and local educational reformers may not find them important enough to include, either.

However, I view the President's proposal as an open door. We need only the will and determination to walk through it. I believe that our case for giving the arts and the humanities a more central role in education is a persuasive one. And I believe it is right.

We can have any kind of schools we want — if we make up our minds to do it. We have the freedom to be outspoken advocates for including the arts and the humanities in the curriculum. We can form alliances with like-minded individuals and groups. We can seek out successful programs and hold them up as examples. And when we finally succeed in raising the arts and the humanities to their rightful, and necessary, place in education, we will have done a great service not only to countless generations of students to come but to the cause of democracy itself.

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PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON THE ARTS AND THE HUMANITIES

The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities was created by executive order on June 15, 1982 for the purpose of analyzing and recommending ways to promote private support for the arts and the humanities.

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